



Croydon Partnership Early Help Strategy 2024-2025

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Introduction

This is an update to Croydon's Early Help delivery plan 2018 – 2021. It sets out the current offer from Croydon's early help partnership including the voluntary and community sector, health and education partners, and Croydon's family hub approach and network of organisations. It maps out how, over the next 12-months and as a partnership, we will build on this.

We are committed to enabling children, young people and their families to tell us what is most important to them and to inspire our partnership vision and strategy. We want to make Croydon the very best place for children and families to thrive. The next 12 months will centre around enabling them to do this, so we can move forward as an early help community, together.

Whether it is in enabling children and young people to live safely, to thrive in education or be valued members of their communities, we are committed to prioritising the voices, needs and ambitions of children and young people so they can live their happiest, most rewarding lives and meet their potential.



1. Understanding early help

The Children Act (2004) sets out the collective responsibilities we have in regard to prevention and early help, through the placing of duties on police, health and local authorities to work together with other partners, to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area.

What is Early Help?

Early Help is an integral part of the role of every person that works with children and young people. It is not about a particular service or team. It is an approach offering help and support at the earliest indication of need. The best early help systems bring together service providers and the communities they serve. The Mayor's Business Plan 2022-26 pledges to:

“refocus the Council on residents’ core priorities.... We will work to make Croydon a place of opportunity for business, earning and learning; to ensure every child and young person in Croydon has the chance to thrive, learn and fulfil their potential;; and to support our residents to live independently while ensuring the most vulnerable people are safe”.

We too are committed to this vision and in line with Future Croydon, the Council's delivery plan, we will work with children and young people to deliver early help services.

“We know our residents want their council to work better for them, to understand them and their needs better and to support the different communities of Croydon more effectively” (Future Croydon)

Why Do We Offer Early Help?

The purpose of Early Help is to enhance a family's capacity and resources, allowing them to work through their challenges and prevent problems building. By addressing dilemmas and difficulties early, we can help them to prevent future problems. Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 emphasizes the crucial role of effective Early Help services:

“Providing Early Help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. Early Help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life, from the foundation years through to the teenage years.”

We will ensure children and young people in Croydon receive the services they need, when they need them from birth, and where they have special educational needs, to the age of 25.

Who Should Provide Early Help?

Everyone shares the responsibility for Early Help. The first person to step in is the professional who identifies a need. Then, regardless of their role or position, anyone working with children and families contributes to delivering early help. This might be schools, health providers, family members or community leaders. We all have a role to play.



2. Our current offer

Early Help is more than a threshold, it's not a specific team or service, but a system wide approach to early intervention and prevention.

Croydon's Voluntary, Community, Social Enterprise and Faith (VCSEF) sector plays a key role, alongside the Council, in implementing Early Help for Croydon residents. Organisations like Home-Start Croydon (supporting families with children under 5s in their own homes), Church of God - Seventh Day (providing essentials to families in need), BabyZone (activities for families with under 5s) or Croydon Drop In, Off the Record, Centre of Change (mental health support for young people) are trusted local VCSEF providers, working alongside the Council, with families, children and young people in need. The borough's high quality VCSEF sector also plays an important role in building social support networks and connections to facilitate maximum participation from Croydon's citizens and utilizing all their amazing talents and skills through projects such as the Best Start ABCD community builder. As the local infrastructure organization, **Croydon Voluntary Action (CVA)**, is constantly updating its directory of such diverse activities and services through the public facing Simply Connect Croydon.

The sector has also partnered with the Council and other stakeholders to initiate **Local Community Partnerships**: inclusive, solutions-focused partnerships that seek to consolidate Croydon's assets and support the transition towards a proactive and preventative care model, which can help residents and families to thrive. There is one in each of the six localities in Croydon. In each locality residents can use trusted **Community Hubs** which are close to home, accessible, welcoming and inclusive spaces where residents can receive wrap around support, be connected to local activities and receive signposting to other specialist voluntary sector services and organizations.

The **Asian Resource Centre Croydon** works with people from cradle to grave and provides timely support to children and families before issues escalate into more serious problems. It offers baby & bump sessions - a social gathering and peer support service for new and expectant mothers and a maternity disparities research project. It works with women around issues they may have during their maternity journey and delivers a health and wellbeing project in Thornton Heath. It runs a **core20plus5** programme through which it raises awareness around maternity issues in its community. It also provides health checks including diabetes toolkits, blood pressure and BMI measurement; language assistance as and when needed for different services and a household support fund that can support families during crisis.

Health partners in Croydon play a pivotal role in delivering early help services for children and families. These agencies collaborate to address additional needs beyond universal services.

Supporting our children, young people and families is one of the five priorities identified within the **Joint Local Health and Wellbeing strategy 2024-2029**. This priority is to be taken forward through a partnership working group made up of

partners working on health and wellbeing from across the local authority, ICB and VCSEF, and reflected through the **Croydon Health and Care Plan**.

During pregnancy and the early years, **Best Start** children's centres and Family Hubs enable integration between maternity services and a confidential texting service for parents and carers. Additionally, it integrates midwifery, health visiting, speech and language and voluntary sector services to provide comprehensive care from pregnancy through early childhood. The universal services delivered through maternity services and health visiting offer children and families in Croydon well-rounded support with health and wellbeing needs during this critical period. Anyone identified as requiring additional support through the universal maternity and health visiting services can be offered additional, specialist support within those services, as well as supporting access to targeted services, such as speech and language therapies and the wider offer within the community and voluntary sector, as appropriate.

Best Start children's centres deliver a programme of early years support and advice on child development, transition into parenthood and early learning groups and activities to support a child's physical, social, emotional and language development so children are ready for nursery at age 2 and school to start Reception. Best Start and Family hubs offers a range of community-based parenting support programmes and group-based activities for parents with both very young and older children. Family Hubs transformation goes beyond the funded programme and will merge into a systemwide early help partnership transformation.

Beyond the early years, a range of health and wellbeing support is available to older children, dependent on need. The **school nursing team** provide early support and needs assessments to children and young people across Croydon's schools. Through collaborative working, professionals across educational settings and other agencies, who identify children and young people who need additional support, can support access to other agencies providing targeted support, such as with mental health, diet and lifestyle, substance misuse, sexual and reproductive health.

The **Family Hub** approach in Croydon is pivotal to the early help offer, providing comprehensive support to families from pregnancy until children turn 19, or 25 for those with disabilities. It is the front door to the borough's early help network. Our family hub delivery model integrates services from health, council, and voluntary sectors to offer a wide range of support, signposting, and information for 24 services. The model encompasses activities for children aged 0-5, midwifery, nutrition management, debt and welfare support, domestic abuse support, early language & learning, parenting support, health visiting, housing, infant feeding support, intensive targeted family support services, and mental health services. By offering these services, Family Hubs ensure accessible early intervention, which is crucial in addressing potential issues before they escalate. This holistic approach enables all families to access the help they need in one place, promoting the well-being and development of children and young people in Croydon.

Through their work, Family Hubs embody the 'Start for Life' offer, a commitment to giving every child the best start in life. Thus, Family Hubs play an essential role in shaping the future of the community by investing in its youngest members and their

caregivers. The network of Family Hubs in the borough is an invaluable element of the early help offer that makes a significant difference to all families living in Croydon.

We are committed to ensuring that the principles, ambition and scope of the family hub approach, and Best Start, shape our work in the long term.

Croydon schools and early years settings play a central role in the borough's early help offer by providing a comprehensive range of services that support children and families through early childhood and into early adulthood. These services include health and wellbeing care, early education, and family support programs. Schools and early years settings work collaboratively with health professionals, social services, and community organizations to ensure that children receive the necessary support to thrive. This integrated approach helps identify and address issues early, reducing the risk of long-term problems.



The Croydon Partnership Early Years Strategy aims to give all children the best possible start in life by focusing on their development, health, and wellbeing. By providing coordinated support, these settings help to reduce inequalities and improve outcomes for children and families, ensuring that every child can reach their full potential.

The council's **Attendance Strategy** aims to improve school attendance by fostering a collaborative approach among schools, parents, and various agencies. The strategy is built on the principles of inclusion and early intervention, with a focus on creating a supportive environment for all students. The attendance strategy contributes to a robust early help partnership offer by:

Promoting Early Intervention: Identifying and addressing attendance issues early through regular monitoring and targeted support.

Fostering Collaboration: Engaging multiple stakeholders, including schools, parents, and agencies, to work together towards common goals.

Providing Holistic Support: Coordinating efforts across different services to address the root causes of absenteeism, ensuring a seamless support experience for families.

Empowering Parents and Students: Involving parents in planning and decision-making processes and encouraging student participation to create a supportive and inclusive educational environment.

This comprehensive approach ensures that attendance issues are addressed proactively, contributing to the overall well-being and academic success of students. The work of the **attendance inclusion team** (5 officers and one senior officer) supports schools and families with early intervention and direct work.

The **Team Around the School (TAS)** approach integrates responses to student welfare needs by coordinating with the Directorate of Children, Young People, and Education. TAS improves access to early help services, providing coordinated interventions to support students with emerging needs, reducing the likelihood of issues escalating to require statutory services. Through coordinated information sharing, TAS swiftly addresses additional needs and streamlines partnership communications, ensuring timely and appropriate interventions.

The SEND Local Area Strategy 2023-2026 also contributes significantly to the early help offer in several ways:

Early Identification and Support: One of the main priorities is to ensure that children and young people with SEND are identified and supported as early as possible. This proactive approach helps in addressing needs before they escalate, providing timely interventions that can make a substantial difference in their development and well-being.

Integrated Services: By promoting high-quality, integrated services, the strategy

ensures that various support systems work together seamlessly. This integration helps in providing a holistic approach to early help, where different services collaborate to meet the diverse needs of children and young people with SEND.

Co-production and Collaboration: The strategy emphasizes working closely with families, children, young people, and professionals. This collaborative approach ensures that the services provided are tailored to the specific needs of the community, making early help more effective and relevant.

Croydon SEND Local Area Strategy 2023-2026

**Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
(SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP)**

Version 7 – 15th June 2023



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Data-driven decision making: Using robust data for forecasting and planning allows for better identification of needs and more efficient allocation of resources. This ensures that early help services are well-targeted and can address the most pressing issues promptly.

Workforce development: By focusing on the development and well-being of the workforce, the strategy ensures that professionals are well-equipped to provide high-quality early help. Training and support for staff mean they can deliver effective interventions and support to children and young people with SEND.

The strategy's comprehensive and collaborative approach ensures that early help is a proactive and integrated part of the support system for children and young people with SEND in Croydon.

The Croydon Safeguarding Children Partnership (CSCP) is a statutory partnership required by Working Together 2023. The lead safeguarding partners are represented by the Local Authority, the Police and Health (Integrated Care Board) who have a joint and equal duty to make arrangements to work together as a team to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in a local area and include and develop the role of wider local organisations and agencies.

In Croydon, the CSCP provides this framework via its Arrangements Document. The CSCP provides assurance of the multi-agency arrangements to safeguard children and improve their outcomes. There are 3 main workstreams:

- Safeguarding Practice Reviews
- The Learning Offer
- Quality Assurance

The Family Solutions Service is the council's targeted early help service. It operates across three localities with six teams, each led by a Team Manager, a Senior Key Worker, and five Key Workers. Key Workers assess families and create intervention plans with professionals, while Senior Key Workers focus on partnership development. Family Solutions collaborates with agencies, including schools, police, and voluntary services, to support families with issues like substance misuse, domestic abuse, and mental health concerns. Utilizing a systemic relationship-based model and various direct work tools, it ensures coordinated, holistic support for children and families, including through the newly launched Family Hubs.

3. The next 12 months - towards a shared outcomes framework

Prevention services can do more to reduce abuse and neglect than reactive services.
(The Munro Review)

As a partnership and with Croydon's children and young people we will build on our robust current offer. We will develop a unifying "system ambition" across the early help partnership, and an outcomes framework against which we will measure and monitor our progress toward the ambition.

We will embed the ambition and outcome framework into the work of all early help providers.

We believe children, young people and families should be the architects of their futures so we will build with them, from the start.

We will work with children, young people and their families to capture areas of their lives that are important to them and against these we will agree a framework which sets out:

Impacts - The key long term, sustainable change we want to secure for all children and young people in Croydon.

Outcomes – The difference we want to make which, if secured, will lead to the impacts being achieved.

What is an outcomes framework

An outcomes framework is a structured tool to plan and measure the impact of services on children and young people's lives. It outlines specific goals and indicators that are important for their wellbeing and development. We will support children, young people and their families to define these goals.

Importance of Outcomes Frameworks

Outcomes frameworks are vital because they ensure services are goal orientated and outcome focused. They promote evidence-based approaches and accountability in service delivery. They enhance partnership working by aligning multiple agencies towards shared goals for children's outcomes. They encourage collaboration and collective responsibility among partners.

When will we do this

We will start straight away. We will work with partners to develop a framework, and with children and families to build content. We will ensure that children and families are able to tell us what good early help outcomes in Croydon should look like and then, as a partnership, we will work toward these.

The future is bright in Croydon. We have made good progress as a partnership, but we know there is still much work to be done.

Together, we will achieve our ambition.

